

Capt. Scott S. Peters, right, forward controller for the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) Command Element; Capt. Scott K. Atwood, center, and Capt. Curtis L. Walker, both FACs with Headquarters and Service Company, Battalion Landing Team, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marines, call in airstrikes Aug. 10 during an air support coordination exercise at Gadoris Range in Djibouti. The MEU conducted the exercise as the Kearsarge Expeditionary Strike Group rounded the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa area of responsibility en route to the Red Sea.

MON. E. BODOLY

Courtesy of the U.S. Marine Corps



Navy to run Horn of Africa effort

Combined joint task force changed to free up Marines

BY SANDRA JONTZ

Stars and Stripes

In a move to free up the U.S. Marine Corps for missions elsewhere, the U.S. Navy will take control of Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa in the coming year.

"Basically, we're looking for an opportunity for the Navy to contribute to the mission that would free up Marine resources, both for training and other missions," said a task force spokesman, Air Force Maj. Ron Waltrous.

Roughly 25,000 of the Corps' combined active and reserve strength of 226,000 currently are deployed in combat missions, including Iraq, Afghanistan and Africa.

The Horn of Africa task force is made up of about 800 military members from all branches of service, primarily Marines.

"The effort to further augment ground forces is something that the Navy is doing to assist its joint servicemembers and

women to win the global war on terror," said Lt. Trey Brown, a Navy spokesman. "The Navy has been involved in the Horn of Africa Task Force since its inception (in 2002) and, by converting to a core staff of Navy personnel, we are freeing Marines for other missions."

A change in the task force's command structure won't alter the mission, said Cmdr. Jeff Breslau, a spokesman for Navy Central Command.

"The mission will remain the same," Breslau said. "The only difference is that there will be an admiral in charge instead of a general."

That admiral is yet to be named, officials said.

Unlike current operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S. military's mission in the Horn of Africa is not classified as a combat operation. U.S. forces are there to provide development and stability in the East African nations so that those militaries, in turn, can provide "for their own defense, border security and internal defense against transnational terrorist organizations," Waltrous said.

U.S. forces have been working with militaries in Yemen, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Sudan, Uganda, Kenya and Comoros, Marine Maj. Gen. Timothy Ghormley, the task force commander, said in a statement.

"Poverty itself doesn't bring about terrorism," he said Wednesday at a Pentagon press briefing. "Destitution with no way ahead [makes people] turn to a more radical approach. We're trying to show them a way to prosperity, to a better life."

Since 2002, U.S. forces have dug 14 wells, built 23 clinics and 61 schools, started 11 medical/veterinarian civic action programs, and done 30 renovation or repair projects to existing schools, community centers and roads.

Additionally, U.S. officials are negotiating with the Djibouti government on the lease agreement for the headquarters at Camp Lemonnier, Waltrous said.

Staff writer Lisa Burgess contributed to this report from the Pentagon.

E-mail Sandra Jontz at jontzs@mil.strips.com

Building on past efforts in country

Some from 130th Engineer brigade returning to Iraq

BY KEVIN DOUGHERTY

Stars and Stripes

The unit motto for the 130th Engineer Brigade is "Sappers In," an apropos rallying cry now that 180 of its soldiers are heading to Iraq next year for another yearlong deployment.

Based in Hanau, Germany, the brigade is sending in about 80 soldiers from its 320th Engineer Company (Topographic) and the balance from its headquarters company. A farewell ceremony is planned for Friday, and unit officials expect soldiers to depart sometime next week.

"Most everyone wants to get this started," said Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Buxbaum, the brigade's ranking noncommissioned officer.

"The sooner we get on the ground," Buxbaum continued, "the sooner we can get our mission started and the sooner we get our year done." Elements of the brigade have been in Iraq almost continuously since the 2003 invasion. The 9th Engineer Battalion out of Vilseck, for example, has been in Iraq since January, and the 302nd Engineer Company returned from its second yearlong gig earlier this month.

The brigade's headquarters staff will oversee the efforts of other engineer units — active as well as reserve — in the theater. Buxbaum estimates that anywhere from 2,500 to 3,500 service members will come under its command, performing duties from road and bridge work to power, water and sewer repair.

For the soldiers and families left behind, "the challenge," said Maj. Paul Baker, the rear detachment commander, will be to manage "the anxiety level of separating soldiers and their families."

Baker and Buxbaum said in some ways it'll be easier this time around because soldiers and family members are more familiar with the challenges that accompany a lengthy deployment.

E-mail Kevin Dougherty at doughertyk@mil.strips.com

Holocaust survivor GI to be honored

Hungarian immigrant to receive Medal of Honor for heroic acts during Korean War

BY LISA HOFFMAN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — He's 77 now, with kidneys half gone, a handful of implanted stents keeping his heart ticking, bad arthritis and an old war injury that's left his right leg all but unusable.

But this week, former Army Cpl. Tibor Rubin will marshal every ounce of his remaining strength for a cross-country trip to take a permanent place in the history of his adopted country.

With a U.S. Army major and a master sergeant as escort, Rubin and his wife, Yvonne, will fly this week from Garden Grove, Calif., to Washington. At the White House on Friday, the Hungarian immigrant and death-camp survivor will finally receive America's thanks for his extraordinary acts of bravery and devotion that saved the lives of dozens of his fellow GIs during the Korean War.

In a solemn East Room ceremony — delayed for more than 50 years at least partly because of the anti-Semitism of one of Rubin's sergeants — President Bush will drape the nation's highest award, the Medal of Honor, around Rubin's neck.

Rubin, who spent a year in a Hungarian village of 120 Jewish families, was rounded up at 13 and sent to the Mauthausen death camp in

Austria. His mother and 10-year-old sister died in an Auschwitz gas chamber; his father, a World War I hero in the Hungarian army, was killed at Buchenwald.

Rubin survived the horror for two years. Then, on May 5, 1945, U.S. soldiers liberated him and some 70 other Jews who had cheated death at the camp. Then, as now, he was moved by the compassion the GIs showed. "[They] picked us up and brought us life," Rubin recalled recently.

In 1948, he worked his way to New York City. In 1950, though not a U.S. citizen and barely conversant in English, he enlisted in the Army as a way to pay back the country that rescued him, and for the doors he thought it would open for building a new life.

Within months, he was on the front lines in Korea, a 20-year-old private first class in I Company, 3rd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division. His first act of bravery came soon, when his sergeant assigned him to hold a strategically critical hill so his battalion could withdraw to safety.

Single-handedly, for 24 hours, he fought off wave after wave of enemy soldiers.

After the battle, scores of the dead and dying littered the hill. Rubin vomited at the sight of all the lives he had taken. "Tibor, you just earned your first Medal of Honor," Rubin recalls his captain saying.

"I didn't know what the hell he was talking about," Rubin said last week.

Later, he disobeyed his sergeant's orders to leave a wounded GI behind, and crawled several hundred yards under sniper fire to help his shrapnel-filled buddy. He "saved my life by carrying me to safety," then-Cpl. Leonard Hamm wrote in a nomination of Rubin for the Medal of Honor. Rubin himself was wounded twice.

In the end, although two unit commanders recommended him three times for the Medal of Honor, the first sergeant in charge of Rubin's unit never prepared the papers. A half-dozen of Rubin's fellow GIs later signed affidavits stating that the sergeant snubbed Rubin because he did not want the combat honor to go to a Jew.

Perhaps Rubin's greatest heroism came during the two and a half years he spent in Chinese prisoner-of-war camps. Nursing a broken leg when overrun by the enemy, he was one of hundreds of U.S. soldiers, wearing only light uniforms, who were forced to march for days through freezing weather to a camp they called "Death Valley."

Over and over, Rubin risked certain death by sneaking out at night and stealing food from the Chinese captors.

The survivors, including Rubin, eventually were repatriated.



COURTESY OF THE U.S. ARMY/SHS

Tibor (Ted) Rubin — age 20 here but now 77 and living in Garden Grove, Calif. — is scheduled to receive the Medal of Honor on Friday from President Bush at the White House.